

**TENNESSEE  
GRASSLAND RESERVE PROGRAM (GRP)  
FY 2005**

The Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) is a voluntary program authorized by the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended by the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002. Program objectives are to restore, enhance, and protect grasslands with emphasis on native grasslands. Tennessee received approximately \$616,000 with a target for obligating these funds by September 30, 2005. Signup for the program is being taken on a continuous basis at the USDA Service Center that services the applicant's county. General program information on the Grassland Reserve Program can be found at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/GRP/>.

Eligible land for the program includes improved (introduced) pastures and hay fields, native grasslands, and lands containing primarily forbs (broadleaf herbaceous plants) and shrubs. Possible enrollment options include a permanent easement, 30-year easement, 30-year rental agreement, 20-year rental agreement, 15-year rental agreement, and 10-year rental agreement. For rental agreements, eligible participants include private landowners and organizations or groups that own or would control the eligible land for the period of the rental agreement. Easements are available only to landowners. Federal or state-owned lands are not eligible for the program.

An eligible offer generally must consist of at least 40 contiguous acres of grassland. Isolated fields of less than 40 acres or offers of less than 40 contiguous acres will only be eligible under three waiver conditions: (a) the offer is at least 10 contiguous acres of grassland containing some existing remnant native grassland prairie and located in certain counties listed in the ranking sheets; (b) the offer is at least 20 contiguous acres of existing native grasses; or (c) the offer is at least 20 contiguous acres of introduced grasses adjacent to at least 20 acres of publicly owned native grasslands and the offer will be converted to native grasses.

Landowner offers for a permanent or 30-year easement within a city limit will be ineligible to participate in the program. Offers for rental agreements within city limits are eligible, but the program emphasis is for rural grasslands to be targeted.

All offers must compete for funding statewide. Accepted offers will be based on an environmental ranking that targets four program objectives equally. These program objectives are: (1) the threat of conversion of the grassland to development or cropland; (2) biodiversity; (3) protection of remnant native grasslands with ecologic significance; and (4) proper grazing management. Tennessee's approved ranking sheets may be viewed at this web site.

In meeting program objectives, the ranking provides additional points for applicants considering restoration of native grass communities. In Tennessee, a maximum of \$4,000 cost share per contract for restoration (50 percent cost-share rate) can be allocated. Restoration is defined as the establishment or renovation of native grassland communities. Essentially three conservation practice treatments will be eligible to receive restoration cost share: (a) the establishment of native grasses under the Pasture and Hay Planting (512) or Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645) standard; (b) native legume interseeding under the Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645) standard; and (c) chemical eradication of introduced grasses under the Early Successional Habitat Development and Management (647) standard. These practice standards can be viewed

at the Tennessee electronic Field Office Technical Guide (<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/efotg/>).

Based on acceptance into the program and the enrollment option selected by the applicant, the value of the easement or rental agreement paid to the applicant is determined as follows:

### Easements

**Permanent Easement** – 100 percent of fair market value (all economic return) minus the grassland value, as determined by an independent appraiser.

**30-year Easement** – 30 percent of the difference between the fair market value and grassland value, as determined by an independent appraiser.

### Agreements

**30-, 20-, 15-, and 10-year Agreements** - Annual payment of between \$8.00 and \$16.50 per acre per each year of the contract, depending on the county where the land is located. County rental rates will be the same as in 2004, and can be determined by contacting the individual county USDA Service Center.

Landowners who select the easement option and are selected for participation in the program have no financial obligation until after an offer based on the appraisal is made by USDA. USDA will pay 100 percent of the appraisal, survey, and legal fees, when filing an easement.

In the Grassland Reserve Program, participants retain the right to hay and graze the grasslands, but it must be done in a manner that maintains the land in viable and diverse grass species. If the land is to be grazed, a conservation plan will be developed outlining a Prescribed Grazing Plan that must be applied. In Tennessee, for grassland used for hay, **NO** haying, mowing, or seed harvest will be allowed on 20 percent of these acres during the primary nesting season. This primary nesting season begins on April 15 and ends August 15. This is needed to maintain habitat value for several ground nesting birds and small game that are in declining numbers across the state.

The program restricts practices that would destroy the grassland community such as the production of crops, fruit trees, and vineyards. Accepted offers will be required to maintain the contract in a grassland community for the life of the contract.

All persons interested in the Grassland Reserve Program are encouraged to sign up before March 1, 2005, to be considered for funding in the first funding period. However, landowners signing up after March 1 will be retained on an active list for future funding.

**PRIOR YEAR ACCOMPLISHMENTS****Fiscal Year 2004 (October 1, 2003, to September 30, 2004)**

Offers for Easements	70
Offers for Rental Agreements	188
Rental Agreements Approved	84
Approximate Acres Accepted for Contracts	7,415
Landowner Financial Assistance Obligated	\$1,040,322

**Fiscal Year 2003 (October 1, 2002, to September 30, 2004)**

Offers for Easements	55
Offers for Rental Agreements	132
Rental Agreements Approved	86
Approximate Acres Accepted for Contracts	8,260
Landowner Financial Assistance Obligated	\$1,039,779

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